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ABSTRACT

This is a report in outline form of the status of teaching English literature in Austria. The schools syllabus prescribes that English literature should be taught after students have studied English for four years, that is, in the 5th form. The short story is the usual prose form selected. In the 5th and 6th forms, one literary work is studied in detail, in addition to a number of short extracts; in the 7th at least one literary work is studied, in addition to various extracts from a Shakespearean play or plays. In the 8th form, two contemporary literary works, plus extracts from various literary genres or periods, are studied. Samples of British verse also are studied in the 7th and 8th forms. A list is given here of the texts used in one school in Vienna for the 5th - 8th forms. Each student must also read a certain number of literary texts on his own at home. The "school leaving" and "university entrance" examination comprises a five-hour essay paper and an optional oral examination. There are two professional associations of English teachers, which are described here. School leaving standards tend to be higher in Vienna and in provincial capitals than elsewhere in Austria. About 1/6 of all university undergraduates study English. The university offers survey courses, literature lecture courses, and literary seminars. Undergraduate course offerings and requirements are described, and graduate study is mentioned briefly. The range and quality of translations of British literature are also briefly discussed, as is the availability of literature texts. (CFM)

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ELT Profile: AUSTRIA

LITERATURE ANNEX

January 1977

1. Status of Literature

English Literature means different things to different people. In print and when performed on the stage it falls into the category of the major imported literature. In study at university level it is a foreign literature which is studied for its own sake. At secondary school level there is considerable disagreement as to whether it falls into this second category or whether it is part of language teaching. In schools some teachers clearly subject the text to close scrutiny and use it partly for language teaching purposes, whilst others concentrate more on characterisation and discussion of theme and plot.

2. Literary Education

2.1 Age at which children are first taught English Literature in state schools, either in the context of ELT or as an independent study.

2.1.1 The schools syllabus prescribes that English Literature shall first be taught at 5th form level after four years of learning English during which basic fluency is attained. Even so, it is clear that some teachers start working with literary texts in the 4th form. The short story is the prose form that is normally selected for this purpose. A Case for the Defence by Greene and The Happy Prince by Wilde being cases in point.

2.1.2 The syllabus states that in both the 5th and 6th forms one literary work shall be studied in detail together with a number of short extracts from literary texts which have a bearing on the work in question; in the 7th form at least one literary work in addition to various extracts from a Shakespeare play or plays; in the 8th form two contemporary literary works (probably defined by many teachers as the first half of the 20th century) plus extracts from various literary genres or periods; also in the 7th and 8th form various samples of British verse. Teachers often attempt more than this and in the 7th and 8th forms may read two or three complete texts in class devoting at least one of the three periods per week available to this. In one school in Vienna the following formed the basis of class texts chosen by the English teaching staff for study in the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th forms. This school one might define as a good, but not particularly outstanding, grammar school.

Pinter: The early Plays
Golding: Lord of the Flies
Henry James: Washington Square
Tenessee Williams: The Quiet American and other Plays
Beckett: Waiting for Godot
Mansfield: The Garden Party
Hemingway: For Whom the Bell Tolls
Hemingway: The Old Man and the Sea
Harper Lee: To Kill a Mockingbird
Eliot: The Cocktail Party
Orwell: Animal Farm
Huxley: Brave New World
Wilde: The Importance of being Earnest
Wilder: Happy Journey
Nevil Shute: On the Beach

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Salinger: The Catcher in the Rye
E Waugh: The Loved One
E Waugh: Decline and Fall
Shaw: Arms and the Man - Pygmalion - Candida
Dickens: David Copperfield's Youth (Austrian edition of the first part of Dickens' novel)
Mark Twain: Tom Sawyer
Chesterton: The Innocence of Father Brown
Maugham: The Moon and Sixpence
Maugham: Cakes and Ale
Churchill memoirs: Second World War - Vol.2 Their finest Hour
Heaven is my Destination
Joyce: Dubliners
Forster: A Passage to India

2.1.3 In addition to these class texts, each pupil is obliged to read privately at home a certain number of literary texts (on average two for each of the school years listed above). The titles are entered on his own personal reading list which is arrived at in consultation with his English teacher who will either encourage or veto his suggestions. An important consideration is that his private reading should augment in some way what is being studied in class. It might augment it thematically, linguistically or in respect of period. A check is made on the pupil's private reading insofar as each pupil has to discuss the progress he has made with his teacher and/or complete a written report or questionnaire on the work in question. In reading lists obtained from another school the following writers were prominent: Graham Greene, A J Cronin, Pearl S Buck, A Sillitoe, Muriel Spark, Angus Wilson (earlier novels and short stories) and Margaret Drabble.

2.2 Describe the literature content in exams at O and A level equivalents, and state whether UK based exams are taken, in state system or elsewhere.

2.2.1 There is no O level equivalent and the "Matura" is the 'school leaving' and 'university entrance' examination. It is not an external exam and each school sets its own papers. The Matura in English comprises a 5-hour essay paper and an optional oral examination. For the essay paper, candidates are required to write one long essay and have three titles to choose from. These titles are suggested by each class teacher and must be submitted to local government inspectors for approval. One of the titles will normally, but not necessarily, be literary and will demand a general knowledge of certain texts studied together in class rather than detailed observation on them. Examples of literary titles which have been set recently in different schools in Vienna included:

"Discuss two 'utopian' novels and indicate to what extent the utopian ideals have a basis in reality"

"Some writers think that it is better to amuse the reader in order to drive home a serious point than to shock him"

"Books may change our outlook on life. Discuss and give examples"

2.2.2 The oral examination is optional to the extent that Matura candidates have to choose to be examined orally in a certain number of subjects they are taking. One of them may be English. Those candidates who do decide to take the oral exam in English will normally be required to comment in some detail on some of the texts listed in their private reading scheme. Oral examiners will include the class

teacher, another teacher of English from the school, the head teacher of the school and the local government inspector for English.

2.2.3 As an alternative to the essay paper, interpretation of a text has recently been suggested for candidates with literary interests. There are as yet however no clear guidelines as to what form such interpretation shall take and until the position becomes clear the Viennese local education authority has decided against introducing it. A pilot scheme is said to be running in other regions of Austria, but there is no information yet to hand.

2.3 Is there a professional association of teachers of English. Indicate its literary activity and any Council involvement.

2.3.1 There are two professional associations of English teachers in Austria. The Arbeitsgemeinschaften der Anglisten, or working groups of English teachers, meet locally on a regional basis on two separate days in any given year in order to pursue a given theme. At such meetings, it is usual to discuss language teaching topics and only rarely is literature, or the teaching of it, considered. The Arbeitsgemeinschaften are well-supported and -attended (teachers are given time off school to attend the meetings and their travel expenses are paid) but the influence of the Arbeitsgemeinschaften is slight as they have no executive power and any recommendations they might submit to the Federal Ministry of Education and Arts will usually not re-emerge from within their walls. The Council is in touch with all the Arbeitsgemeinschaften and can provide lecturers where necessary.

2.3.2 The Neuphilologenverband, the modern languages association, is more academic and its main activity is to publish a journal called "Moderne Sprachen" irregularly. The editorial board is now made up almost entirely of senior grammar-school teachers of English. Until recently university staff predominated on this board and in the production of articles, but at a meeting in Linz in 1969 it was felt that their influence was too strong and that practising classroom teachers at secondary level should be encouraged to contribute more. Clearly the intention was to mirror the eminently professional journal of the West German modern languages association "Die Neuen Sprachen" whose members had recently made a similar decision. The gambit in Austria was not successful as, with fewer university lecturers contributing, the journal is now published much less frequently than before. The contents page of a recent publication (July-December 1974) might be translated as follows:

'Classroom use of anglophone prose from the former Commonwealth countries of the 3rd world'

'The rebirth of the novel in Latin America'

'Report on a US-tour undertaken by members of the Association in July/August 1974'

'Report on a conference of the Modern Languages Association in Great Britain in January 1974'

'Report on the 4th International Annual Conference of the Associations of German Teachers in Kiel.'

'Book Review'

The Council has so far not been represented on the editorial board and has not contributed any articles.

2.4 Literature textbooks most widely used; whether simplified, abridged, etc; indicate school-leaving standards.

2.4.1 The range of authors and titles already given in para 2.1 above is representative of teachers preferences throughout Austria and need not be repeated here.

2.4.2 Comparatively little use is made of the simplified reader series in Austria. Most of the local government school inspectors do not approve of their use and would find it difficult to endorse them at Matura level. Some teachers very sensibly employ them as an aid to faster reading at 4th and 5th form level, but unfortunately the most widely known series is the Longman series and those of other publishers are only now becoming known.

2.4.3 It is very difficult to indicate school leaving standards with any measure of reliability since exams are internal affairs within the school with no real moderation obtaining. Standards tend to be higher in Vienna and in provincial capitals than in country districts simply because of the university influence of the towns and the fact that teaching posts in towns are harder to come by and attract the better-qualified teacher. To give some indication of standards it might be said that most Matura candidates would be able to read with reasonable accuracy and fluency a Graham Greene short story but that most would experience considerable difficulty given a Virginia Woolf text.

2.5 Percentage of undergraduates studying some English; percentage specialising in English.

2.5.1 All university English undergraduates pursue a sort of joint honours degree in which they study two subjects to an equal extent. In addition they must all attend courses in educational theory and practice. Apart from this division, there is no such thing as main-subsidiary subject study. In Vienna, about one sixth of all university undergraduates read English as one of their subjects, and one would expect a similar proportion to obtain in the provincial universities.

2.6 Organisation of degree courses in Literature (ie whether chronological or genre based, etc); periods of literature substantially covered; depth of study at finals level (eg how much would a student have read?)

2.6.1 A number of 'survey' courses will normally be offered, one of which the student is obliged to attend, though he will often attend two, and these will usually be accomplished during his first two semesters. Survey courses which have been offered recently in Vienna included: the Elizabethan to Restoration period; the 18th century and the Romantics; the 19th century. In addition to such survey courses the undergraduate will attend a further 8-12 literature lecture courses during the period of his study which lasts a minimum of 8 semesters but which may last 12 semesters and beyond if he has to repeat a significant number of courses. The lecture courses offered recently at Vienna have included the 19th century American novel; early 17th century poetry, metaphysical poets and early Milton; 18th century prose (excluding the novel); early Victorian poetry; Romantic verse. Each lecture is a double period (45 mins x 2) each course meets on average 12 times during the semester.

2.6.2 The university professors of English (in Vienna there are three professors of literature) may decide for themselves which aspects of literature they lecture on and lecture courses offered change from year to year if not from semester to semester. The main constraint

in what they offer is the students reading list for the first degree, the Lehramtspruefung, c.f. the British MA, a copy of which is located in ETIC Archives. Lecture courses offered should not digress too much from the outlines of this reading list for this is what candidates will be examined on at the end of their course of study.

2.6.3 From October 1977 the literary lecture courses offered will need to be more representative of the course as a whole for two reasons. The first is that the final exam will no longer exist for candidates enrolling from this date and will be replaced by a method of continuous assessment. The second reason is that candidates will be required to enroll for only 50% of the literature courses which are currently being taken. Thus the courses themselves will need to be broader in scope and to cover adequately the period in question, will have to be more carefully chosen.

2.6.4 Besides the courses so far mentioned, the English Department undergraduate is required to attend one literary seminar during his course of study and this, assuming he completes the courses in the minimum period of 8 semesters, he will usually attempt in either his 6th or 7th semester. He will be required to write a seminar paper, on average 30 pages of A4, double spaced typing, which will then have to be defended in front of the other members of the seminar. One of the literature seminars currently being offered in Vienna is on "Our Mutual Friend" and "Middlemarch". Papers written will include discussions of themes, characters and characterisation, background, reader participation, authors intention, and structural analysis. Seminar papers may be written either in the students' mother tongue or in English, depending on university practice. In Salzburg for example all literature seminar papers are written and discussed in the students' mother tongue, German; in Vienna the medium chosen is English.

2.6.5 The most serious study for the student of English will probably be his seminar paper and participation in the seminar referred to above and his diploma paper which he will normally write in his final semester before submitting himself for the Lehramtspruefung. The diploma paper will normally consist of between 70-100 pages of typed, double-spaced A4 which must then be bound and should deal with a topic which has not been discussed previously in the institute. In literature a student is often required to analyse a novel and the aspects on which he writes will include those referred to in 2.6.4 above.

2.6.6 The Lehramtspruefung in English literature is an oral exam lasting for approximately one hour. As a general principle examiners will try to discover with what breadth and depth the student has read during his undergraduate career and they will probably select those aspects of the reading list which best enable them to do this. They will obviously also be guided by the courses the candidate has followed and the credits he has gained during his semesters of study. The candidates themselves will generally find it difficult to anticipate the examiners' questions and must be prepared to demonstrate that they have covered all aspects of the reading list adequately and certain aspects in depth.

2.7 Principles and structure of postgraduate degrees; research capacities of national or university libraries.

2.7.1 The doctorate is the postgraduate degree in Austria, the Lehramtspruefung being the qualifying examination. (Under certain circumstances, eg if the student concerned is fairly sure of an academic

career, he may attend an extra seminar and thereby be exempted from the Lehramtspruefung.) The doctorate must include substantial original research and may require the student to remain in Britain for some time to follow up references not usually obtainable in Austria. The thesis will normally consist of some 100-300 pages and must be read by two examiners. The 'viva voce' will normally last at least one hour, preliminary questions on the thesis itself soon giving way to a wide-ranging and searching general discussion.

2.7.2 It might also be pointed out that the doctorate as well as the Lehramt is a joint honours affair. Doctoral candidates must also submit work on a second subject and are additionally examined in philosophy.

2.7.3 Students have access to four types of library in Austria: the departmental library, the university central library, the British Council library and the Austrian National library. As a general principle only research students are allowed to remove volumes overnight from the university departmental libraries and this is also a characteristic of the National library where the principle is more stringently enforced. Loans from the BLLD are slowly becoming established in Austria but despite this facility most research students will spend considerable time in Britain consulting source material at first hand.

3. Literary Scene

3.1 A statement on the status of the mother-tongue literature(s); whether taught in schools; and whether local writers work in English.

Austria has a long literary history. Contemporary or near contemporary writers such as Ingeborg Bachmann, Elias Canetti, Wolfgang Bauer and Peter Handke are well known abroad. It would be unusual, though not inconceivable to find contemporary writers working partly in English. English is the first foreign language in Austria and is well understood by the educated public.

3.2 A statement on the range and quality of translations of British literature into the vernacular.

The works of literature referred to in paragraph 2.1 of the profile could all be defined as modern British (or American) classics. There are translations into German of all of them. It appears that as soon as a writer achieves fully-recognised status in Britain translations of his works into German soon follow. As a general tendency play-wrights are more quickly translated than prose writers; there are for example translations of Stoppard but not Ayckbourn, of Amis but not Bainbridge. The quality of translations into German is reckoned by the Interpreters and Translators Institute in Vienna to be wide ranging and variable. There are many good translations but an equal number of poor renderings into the vernacular - the latter often brought about by publishers' inflexible deadlines and poor rates of pay for literature translations as compared with technical translations.

3.3 Availability of Literature texts in libraries and bookshops.

3.3.1 Vienna is fairly well catered for. The British Bookshop in Vienna is run by Blackwells of Oxford and the selection of literature available reflects current university and school reading lists. Most provincial centres are not so well off and many provincial customers order their books through Vienna.

3.3.2 The National Library has already been mentioned and suits Vienna much more than the provinces. It is also noticeable that several provincial university departmental libraries are inadequately stocked, the Council library in Vienna supplying a disproportionate amount of students' requirements.